Chula Vista, CA

By 1968 Robert and son were on the run. Robert drove as far west as possible. He settled within jogging distance of the Mexican border. Chula Vista was a charming coastal community just south of San Diego. He easily found work at Aztec TV, not far from the motel he and Sam were staying. By securing a babysitter for Sam, Robert hoped to keep at least one son, away from a foster home or the "easy life" his father Frank promoted.

"In the meantime, I (rented) a house…beautiful house, right in a cul-de-sac. I could look out at night from my big, front window…I could look out and see Tijuana. The rent was $98.00 a month."

This was Robert's chance for family life. So, after getting settled, he wanted to show his son the big wide world. Being so close to the ocean; on a warm sunny day, father and son went to the beach.

"(We went to) Silver Strand Beach, outta San Diego on Hwy. 1. I had (Sam) with me, he was a little tyke, about 3 years old. I was (trying to) teach him how to swim, (but) he was scared shitless of the ocean. I couldn't get him in the water. I says, '(Sam), if you don't…right where you're sittin, a monster is gonna come outta the ground!' (Then) what the hell comes outta the ground? One of those big…green (sea) turtles! You know, they're not small. It literally raised up (from under) him…my God, that kid went into total panic. No wonder he's all screwed up."

People on the beach started to come over to the screaming little boy, thinking Robert was hurting him. Robert explained his poor choice of words and even worst spot to set his son. People laughed as they watched the turtle crawl down the beach to the water's edge.

"What a nightmare, I can't (stay) out of trouble, not even now."

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Still leery of theft and discrimination, Robert took to wearing a money belt while at work. He kept important papers that explained his circumstance with Colorado Welfare; the VA Hospital and even a newspaper clipping of the attempt on his life.

"And what the fuck happens? Three months later, here comes the FBI. They put me in handcuffs (while) at work, and (charged) me with (attempted) murder. I says, 'Just a minute, what am I going to do with my son?' 'Where's your son?' 'With a babysitter.' 'Where's the babysitter?' So, they stopped and took (Sam). (Then while) they started screening (me) for a weapon, they (found) I had the belt (with) papers. (The agent) says, 'what's all this?' I says, 'Well…it's the story of my life.' "

"We got to their office, and they asked me a lot of questions about me, who I killed, who haven't I killed, who I beat up…shit, they interrogated me for about 6 hours. Poor (Sam) was sleepin. They got one of the lady cops to kind of babysit (him) cause he was in shock…"

The agents contacted the Trinidad Police Department, checking out Robert's background and explanation of events. They seemed satisfied but still had to hold him for the Colorado authorities.

"(They said) we're gonna put you in detention cause they're commin after you. (But) if they fall down the stairs, they fall down the stairs."

"I didn't know what the hell they meant – there was no stairs! So I was in detention, thinkin – what the hell stairs they were talkin about. So I waited. Then I heard voices…and who the hell do I hear? Old DeBono! Son of a bitch. That crazy little bastard. He wasn't small, he was a big, husky guy. An (always) smoking his dang cigar. One of the worst stinkin cigars there is. That thing stunk worse than a skunk."

"One of the FBI agents that had picked me up, come and peeked in the door (at me). He says, 'Well, see you on the stairwell!' and he pushed (DeBono) in and winked at me – <u>then</u> I got the drift! They closed the door and DeBono caught on and he banged on the door (but) nobody was there. Ah fuck…<u>POW</u>! I worked him over really good…. (and) I kept his cowboy hat."

"The agent came (back) and asked, 'Did you get enough of this boy?' Yep! (So) the FBI guy (tells DeBono), 'You go back to Trinidad, and you tell um if anybody else tries to come for (Bob) there's gonna be a hell of a war between Trinidad and San Diego FBI.' "

The spectacle of an FBI raid caused Robert to lose the Aztec TV job. The $98 rent was due in 2 weeks. So, Robert applied for several other jobs in the area.

"I had this Mexican lady baby sittin (Sam). She was real good with (Sam)…that poor kid, he was all fucked up. (Then) one of those times I went into town, came back and no (Sam)…the (babysitter) was all beat up."

From the sitter's description, Robert knew it was his father Frank who kidnapped the boy and hurt her.

"He took (Sam) back to Trinidad. Well shit…fuck it. (I) got in my truck an took off…never went back to that area…. that's when the wholesale (rock) business started."

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All Bob & Nellie's children were under the influence of his father, sister-in-law, friends and child welfare. The welfare agency made it clear: Bob had to pay so much a month for the kid's support. He was to have no contact or communication with his kids.
Even though some of the older kids would sneak a visit to their dad; while they were in foster care, the younger kids couldn't understand why they were abandoned by their dad. Bob knew if his kids were around his father any length of time, they would acquire bad habits such as drinking alcohol, smoking pot, cheating, stealing and lying…the 'easy life'.

"(From) my dad's influence, that's how he got to my kids. Cause you know kids, I don't care where they are, are allergic to any kind of duty or detail you give um. (But if) you give them a little wine to start with, they start to feeling that 'wheee heee! This is fun!' And there it goes. [Lowered voice] God, you have no idea how I used to fight them…to the end."

Before Bob lost control over his kids, he tried to instill into them, some of the common sense he had learned from his aunts and uncles. Especially when outdoors in the boonies.

"Before you go stompin around the desert here; this is what you gotta do to find out where the rattlesnakes are. (Take a big, long stick) start from center and go around in circles to cover a big area. You do this for the rest of your life, so you can know where the rattlesnakes are, and where they aren't. Don't try to kill them if you can help it, because they help nature."

As Bob's kids got older…

"They don't remember me teaching them that…it was their grandpa (that did). He never taught um a damn thing but how to get drunk and smoke pot…you take a young child, and you put something in his head, he'll never forget it, and that's what (they're) gonna live by. That's why all my kids ain't worth a……(but) I don't blame them. Where I do blame um is (not having) enough sense to come (to me) and find out the truth. The few that did, they couldn't accept it."

"They'd rather accept grandpa's way, cause it was the easy way out. I'm not gonna try to…make them change their minds. They're already brain washed."

One of Bob's sons wanted to haul drugs on the side as a trucker, to make a lot of money real quick.

"Gettin involved with pot and all that, it's fun. Makes you happy and you forget about the world going around in circles, an you're in limbo – a happy limbo."

Until that rattlesnake bites.